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Dear Appropriations Committee Members:

I am a Puerto Rican lawyer serving the Latino community in the Greater Hartford Area. Most of my clients are Latina women who are survivors of domestic violence. I consider the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LAPRAC) a vital part of the Hispanic community as it provides information, networking and a sense of community to professional providers like me who provide services to the Latino Community throughout Connecticut. It was the Legislature, in keeping with current trends of addressing the issues of a growing community, which had the wisdom and foresight to establish this Commission in the first place. More than ever, LAPRAC continues to be a vital agency serving the needs of the Hispanic population in Connecticut.

Furthermore, LAPRAC has been the voice of the Hispanic community in many areas including health, education, immigrant issues and youth to just name a few. It has been instrumental in working with many partners in the community such as the Department of Education, the Department of Social Services, Department of Public Health and Administrative Services to ensure that the programming available within those organizations is made available to the Hispanic community statewide.

The Hispanic community has been hurting for many more years than the current harsh economic times. It would be so detrimental to do away with an agency that can bring those major concerns to the table of those with the power and influence to be able to make the situation better for those under-served in areas of employment, housing, health, education, and domestic violence survivors.

I respectfully request the Appropriations and, through it, the Legislature to recognize the value of LAPRAC and ensure that it remains a part of the State budget. We are sure LAPRAC can agree to institute any and all measures that will assist with this hard economic downturn but to remove LAPRAC now would be denying services to the grand population that is in dire need of services at this time.

I can be reached at 860-231-8916 should you have any questions pertaining to this letter. I also stand ready to provide testimony if it would help LAPRAC's cause.

Respectfully,



Ramona Mercado-Espinoza